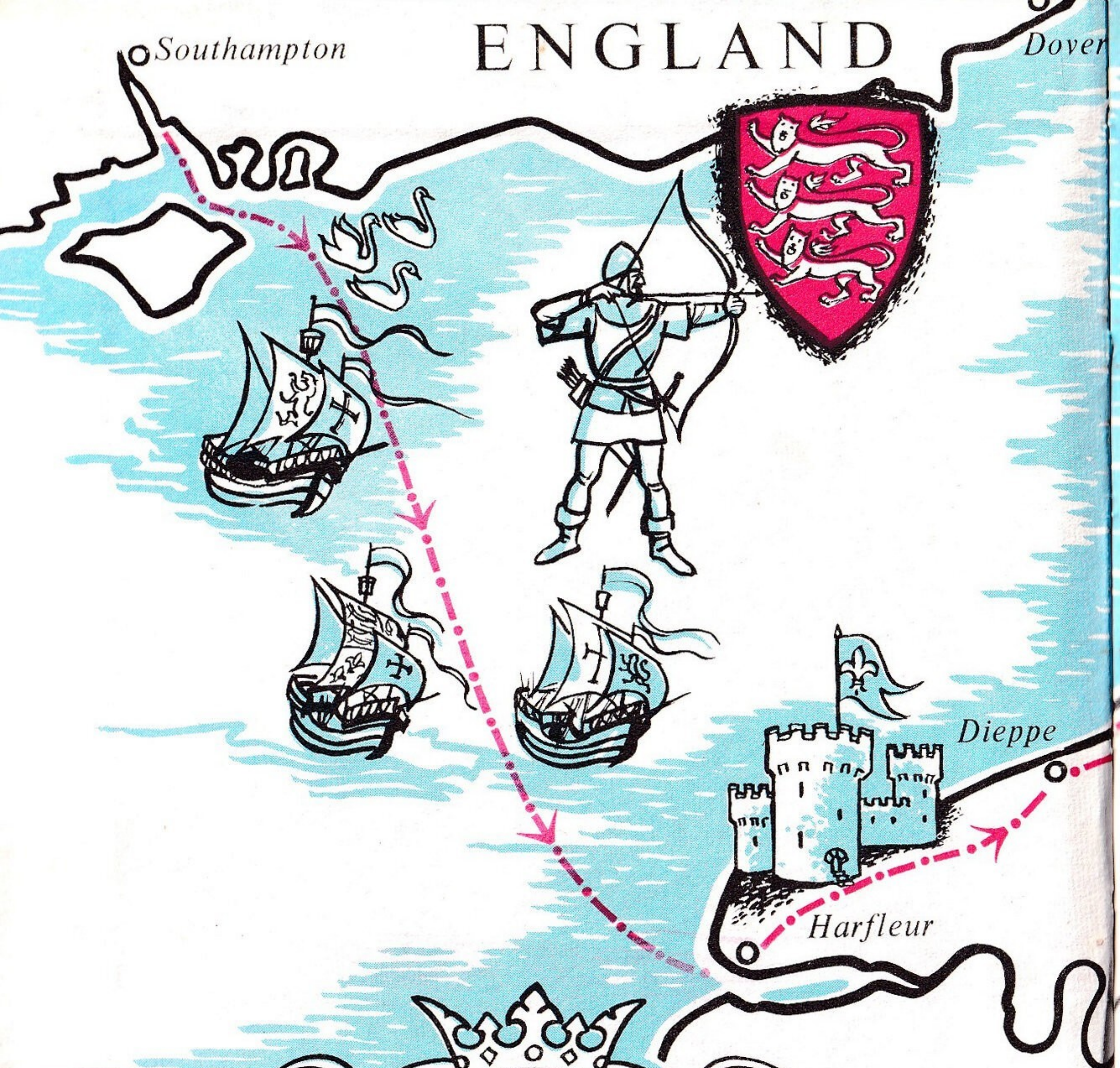


THE STORY OF HENRY V

A LADYBIRD BOOK

An Adventure from History





King Henry's
campaign in France
and the battle of
Agincourt

FRANCE

Calais

Boulogne

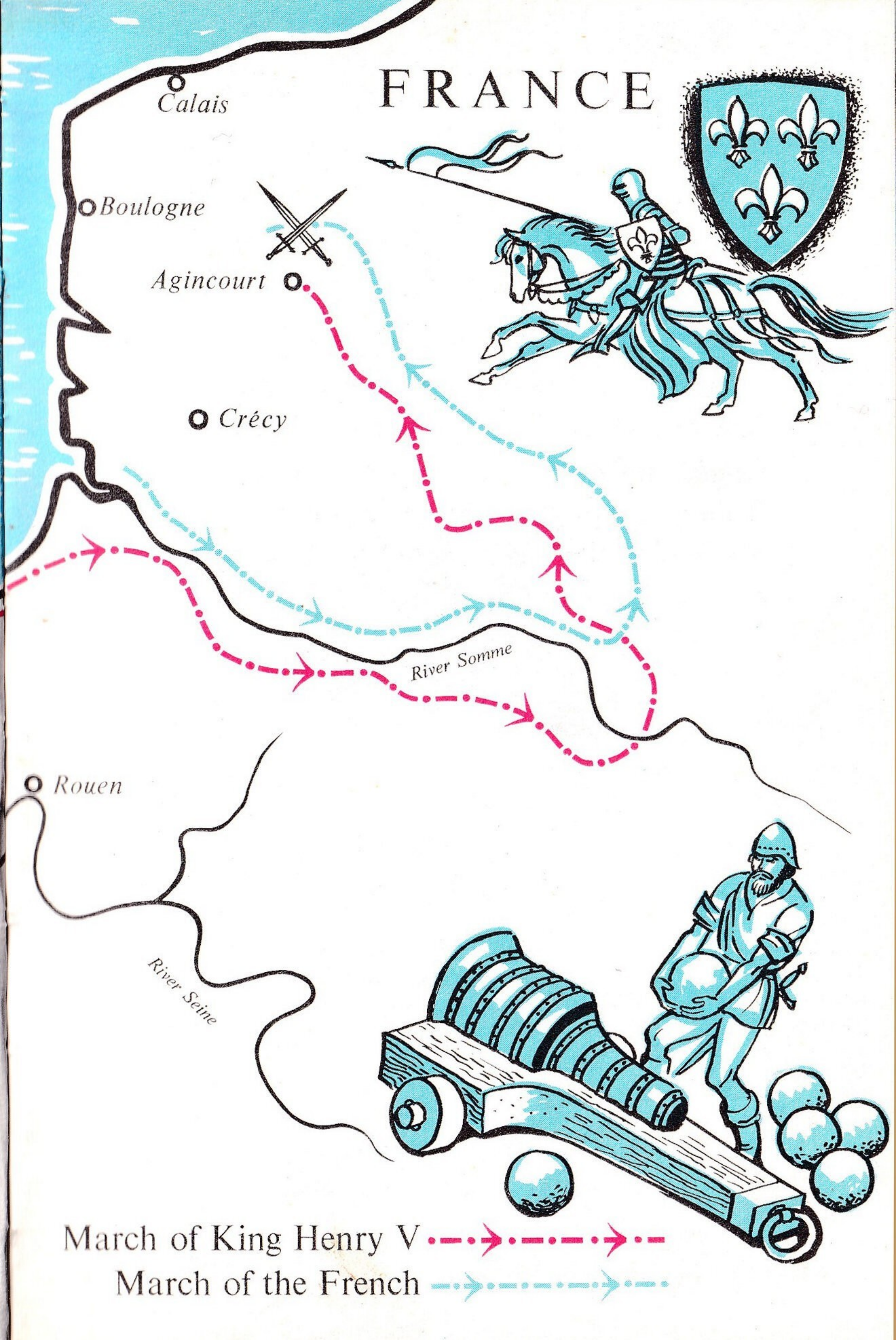
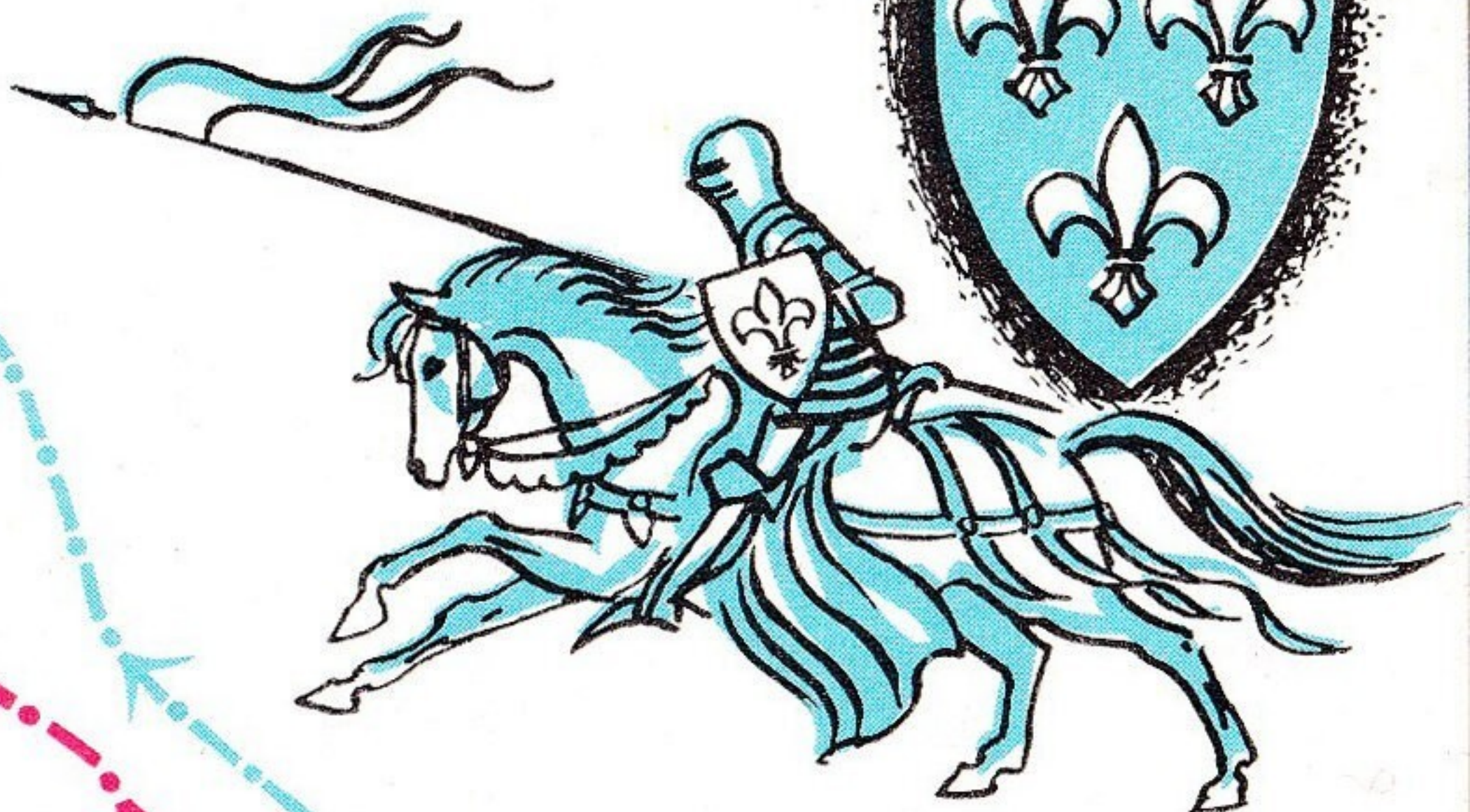
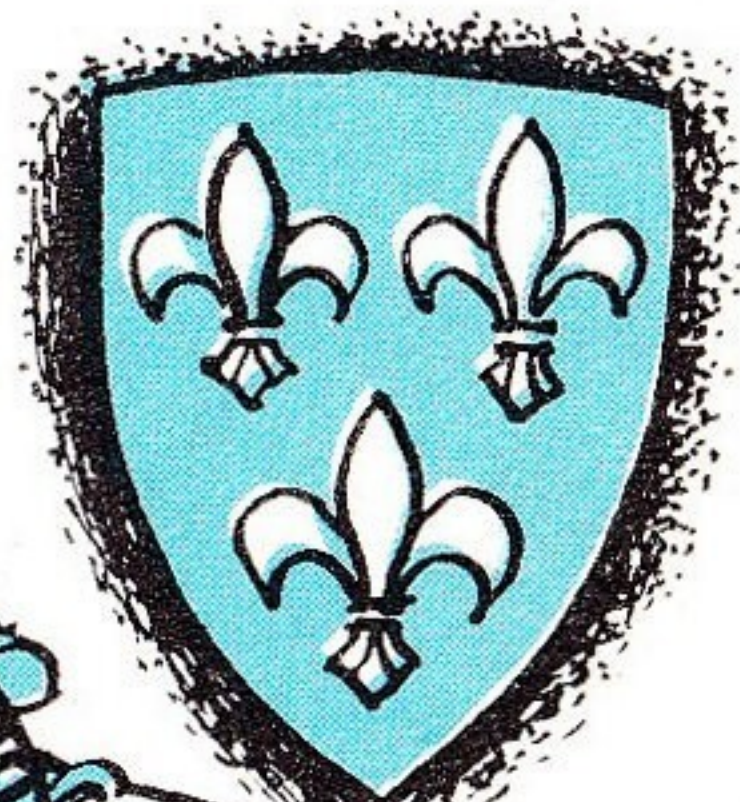
Agincourt

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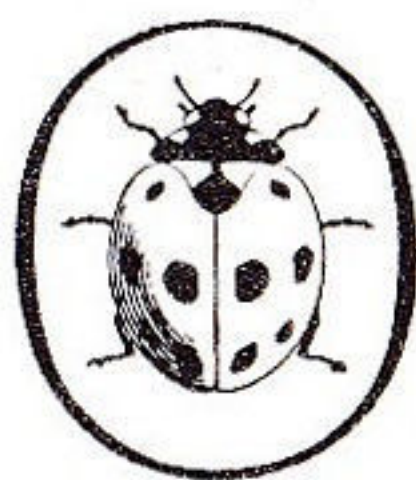
Rouen

River Seine



March of King Henry V

March of the French



Series 561

“God for Harry, England, and Saint George!” was the battle cry of the men who fought and won the battle of Agincourt. This is the story of that Harry—King Henry V of England—who led them to that famous victory.

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AN ADVENTURE FROM HISTORY

THE STORY OF HENRY V



by
L. DU GARDE PEACH

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JOHN KENNEY

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THE STORY OF HENRY V

When Henry V was a boy it was said of him that he was "so swift a runner that he could give chase to a deer and catch the fleetest of the herd."

That is written in a very old book. It may not be quite true because a deer can run very fast indeed.

Henry was born in the year 1387. His father became King of England when Henry was twelve years old, and in those days boys of noble families spent most of their time out of doors learning to ride and use knightly weapons. We are told that Henry loved to take part in wrestling and fencing and all kinds of outdoor sports.

When Henry IV was King, very few people in England, except the monks, could read or write. However, young Prince Henry learned all he could so that when his father died, and the time came for he himself to become King, he would be able to rule the country wisely. There still exists an entry in a royal account book for "seven books of grammar bought for the young Lord Henry."



In the year 1400, when Henry was thirteen, England was very far from being the peaceful land which it is to-day.

Scotland was a hostile country and the Scottish borderers were constantly raiding the northern counties of England. Although Wales was supposed to belong to the English crown, the Welsh were always in rebellion. At the same time the great English nobles all kept private armies of their own, and the King never knew when two or three of them might combine against him.

Because of all this, the King had constantly to travel about the country, keeping the peace at home or leading his army against the Scots or Welsh. On these travels Prince Henry often went with his father, staying in the great castles of friendly noblemen, and no doubt looking on at many a skirmish and battle from a safe distance.

He was in this way learning to know the country over which he would one day rule, and the people he would govern.



Travelling, even for the King, must have been very uncomfortable indeed. None of the carriages had any springs, and the royal coach was more like a covered wagon. Because of the rough state of the roads, it often required several horses to draw it.

Another way of travelling used by noblemen or rich merchants was by horse litter. This was a small light carriage with no wheels, but with shafts both back and front, into which horses were harnessed. The two horses had to be trained to go at exactly the same pace, and it was probably much smoother than bumping over the uneven roads in a wheeled cart without springs.

Many people travelled on horseback, and farm carts were often drawn by oxen.

One thing which would strike us as strange was the way in which the trees and bushes were cleared for a hundred yards on each side of the roads. This was to prevent the robbers, of whom there were many, from taking unwary travellers by surprise.



Although the roads were bad, they were busy and gay, because everybody had to use them, and everybody, men and women alike, wore brightly coloured clothes.

The royal coach might have been clumsy and uncomfortable, but it was very brightly painted and gilded. Even the ordinary farm carts were gay, as they still are in the south of Italy to-day.

A rich man in the time of Henry IV wore a velvet doublet, with very long sleeves often made of some different material such as silk or brocade. On his legs he would have tight coloured hose, often with a different colour for each leg. His long pointed shoes matched his hose, so that he might have one red leg and one blue one.

The women of the period were even more brightly dressed, with long flowing robes of wonderful colours and material, and with silver and gold braid twisted in their hair. Both men and women wore richly jewelled brooches, with rings on their fingers and gold chains around their necks.



Five hundred years ago boys grew up more quickly than they do now. Because there was so much less to learn, they spent their time in rough outdoor sports instead of in school.

The result was that boys were often doing men's work in important positions at an age when to-day they would still be at their lessons.

Prince Henry was no exception. At the age of thirteen he was told by his father that he had to preside over the Council which governed Wales. This Council was made up of wise men who gave him good advice, and to help him there was a nobleman called the Justicier.

Young as he was, Henry had a strong sense of what was fair and right. The story has come down to us of how he once found a port officer holding back a cargo from a group of merchants to whom it belonged. Henry listened carefully to what each side had to say. He decided that the officer was in the wrong and the merchants duly received their cargo.



Henry V is remembered in English history as the great soldier who won the battle of Agincourt, but he was only sixteen years old when he took part in his first real battle.

It was near the town of Shrewsbury. One of the great nobles had gathered his men to fight against the King, and Prince Henry marched from Wales to join his father. They met at Shrewsbury where they found the rebel army waiting to attack them.

It was a long and hard-fought battle, and young Henry was in the thick of it. Surrounded by his knights he fought bravely with sword and mace, until suddenly a chance arrow struck him in the face and seriously wounded him. The soldiers around the Prince tried to make him draw out of the fight to have the wound attended to, but Henry knew that he must set an example to his men.

“If the Prince flies, who will wait to end the battle?” he said. So Henry remained, in spite of the pain of his wound, until the battle was won.



In the town of Shrewsbury there are old houses still standing which were already there when Prince Henry was young. These houses give us a very good idea of what a town looked like five hundred years ago.

They were mostly made of wood and plaster, and the upper stories were built out over narrow streets paved with rough cobble stones. A gutter ran down the middle of the street into which all the rubbish and refuse was thrown by the citizens. As it was nobody's business to clean them, the streets became so dirty that people wore shoes mounted on wooden blocks to keep their feet out of the mud. These shoes were later called pattens.

The shops were all open in front, and before each one stood a boy apprentice shouting to people to come and buy.

It must have been very crowded and noisy, and the pigs which rooted in the gutters even in quite large towns, did not make it any easier to get about.



Many of the castles belonging to the great noblemen are still to be seen. Some are in ruins, but others are almost as they were when Prince Henry slept in them when travelling about the country with his father.

We should think them very uncomfortable if we had to stay in them to-day. They were built for defence, not comfort, and often had to withstand sieges lasting for months or even years. So they had to be strong, and often the walls were fifteen or twenty feet thick. There were no windows on the outside, only narrow slits through which the defenders could shoot at the men who were attacking them.

Unless a castle was on the top of a hill it was surrounded by a moat, over which there would be a drawbridge. This could be raised at night or when the castle was besieged.

The gateway beyond the drawbridge led through the thick wall into a courtyard, around which were the living rooms.

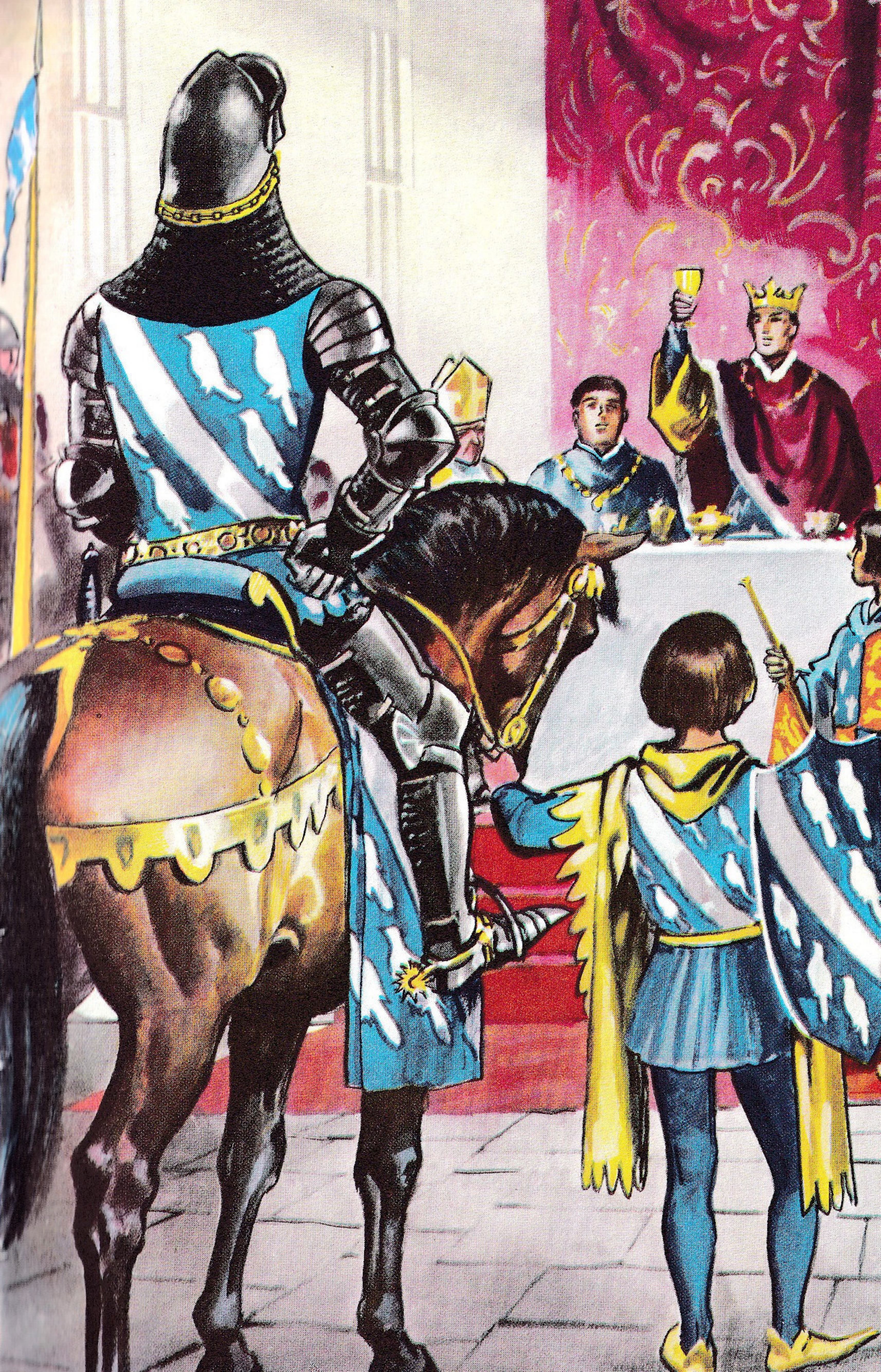


In the year 1413, Prince Henry's father, King Henry IV, was taken ill whilst attending a service in Westminster Abbey, and he died shortly afterwards. Three weeks later Prince Henry was crowned as Henry V in the same place.

The coronation of a King in those days was always followed by a feast in the Great Hall of Westminster. This Hall is still to be seen, almost exactly as it was in the days of Henry V.

At this feast there were some customs which would seem strange to us. One of them was the entrance of a man known as the King's Champion. He rode into the middle of the Hall on horseback, in full armour, and offered to fight anyone who challenged the new monarch's right to the crown of England.

The feast was attended by the nobles and chief citizens of London, and minstrels sang and played to amuse the company. The most wonderful dishes were served, and the account of the coronation of Henry V tells us that they were brought in by servants mounted on horseback.



The fighting in Wales had taught Prince Henry the value of the bowmen in a battle.

Bows and arrows were used by men here in England long before the beginnings of recorded history. But the earliest bows of the stone-age men were very poor and the arrows, tipped with flint, were not very well made.

By Henry's time both bows and arrows had been very much improved. An expert Bowman could shoot an arrow many hundreds of yards, and at close range even armour was no sure protection against them.

Archery, which means the use of bows and arrows, was encouraged everywhere in mediaeval England. So much so that men were fined for playing football instead of shooting at the butts, which is what the round targets were called. Butts were set up on every village green, and prizes were often given to those men who could shoot most accurately. Henry knew that these young men, shooting for fun on the village greens of England, were the men who were going to win England's battles in the future.



When William, Duke of Normandy, conquered England, he still retained all his lands in France. The English Kings who followed him kept the title of Duke of Normandy, and in addition, by marrying the daughters of French noblemen, they obtained possession of almost half of France.

By the time of Henry V much of this had been lost. So Henry decided to gather together an army and win it back again. If he could, he meant to conquer the whole country and make himself King of France as well as King of England.

The French King suspected that Henry intended to invade, so he sent men to bargain with him and try to persuade him not to. Henry might have agreed in the end if the French King's heir, called the Dauphin, had not done a very foolish thing. He sent a box of tennis balls to Henry, scornfully telling him that he had better stay at home and play tennis, and not try to conquer France.

This made Henry very angry. He sent back a message that he would reply with cannon balls.



Henry immediately set about the task of gathering an army and assembling the ships to carry men and horses across the Channel.

To do this he needed money, and as there were no regular taxes, he found it difficult to get enough to pay his soldiers. So he had to borrow money from the rich merchants of London. One of these was Sir Richard Whittington. Everybody has heard of Dick Whittington, though probably most people do not know that he was a real person.

Sir Richard Whittington lent the King large sums of money. Then, later on, when Henry had won many battles in France, he entertained him to a famous banquet in London. When the banquet was over, Sir Richard went to a large chest and taking out all the King's bonds, threw them into the fire, thus cancelling the debt.

Henry was very pleased at being let off having to repay so much money. "Never before has a King had such a subject," he said. "Never before has a subject had such a King," replied Sir Richard.



It is difficult for us to picture the ships in which men sailed the seas in the time of Henry V. They were, of course, much smaller than our great ocean liners, and because they were all sailing ships, they were dependent upon the wind.

What would strike us most would be the gay colours. Not only were hulls decorated with bright patterns, but when Henry's knights were on board they hung their shields all along the sides. When the sails were hoisted, more colour was added to the gay scene. Pictures of saints, or red and gold crosses were on the large mainsails, and the flags at the mastheads fluttered gaily.

Many of the ships had three masts, and in the bows and the stern were high platforms for the bowmen. High up on the masts were more platforms, so that the bowmen could shoot down on to the decks of enemy ships from above.

The sailing ships were slow and clumsy, but the English sailors who manned them were amongst the best in the world.



At last everything was ready. Men and horses were aboard, and from his ship, named *La Trinité Royale*, Henry signalled to the other ships to follow him out of the harbour.

The 1,500 ships must have been a brave sight as they set out on that August Sunday in the year 1415. The sun was shining and the minstrels were playing merry tunes, but many men must have wondered whether they would ever again see the shores of England.

Their fears were increased when three of the ships caught fire and were completely burned out. The English were very superstitious and this was taken as a bad omen. Fortunately a good omen occurred as the ships rounded the Isle of Wight. A large number of swans appeared and swam for a time alongside the ships. This made the men more hopeful for the success of the expedition, because swans were royal birds and were believed to bring good luck.

The sails disappeared over the horizon, carrying this army of 30,000 men to one of the most famous victories in English history.

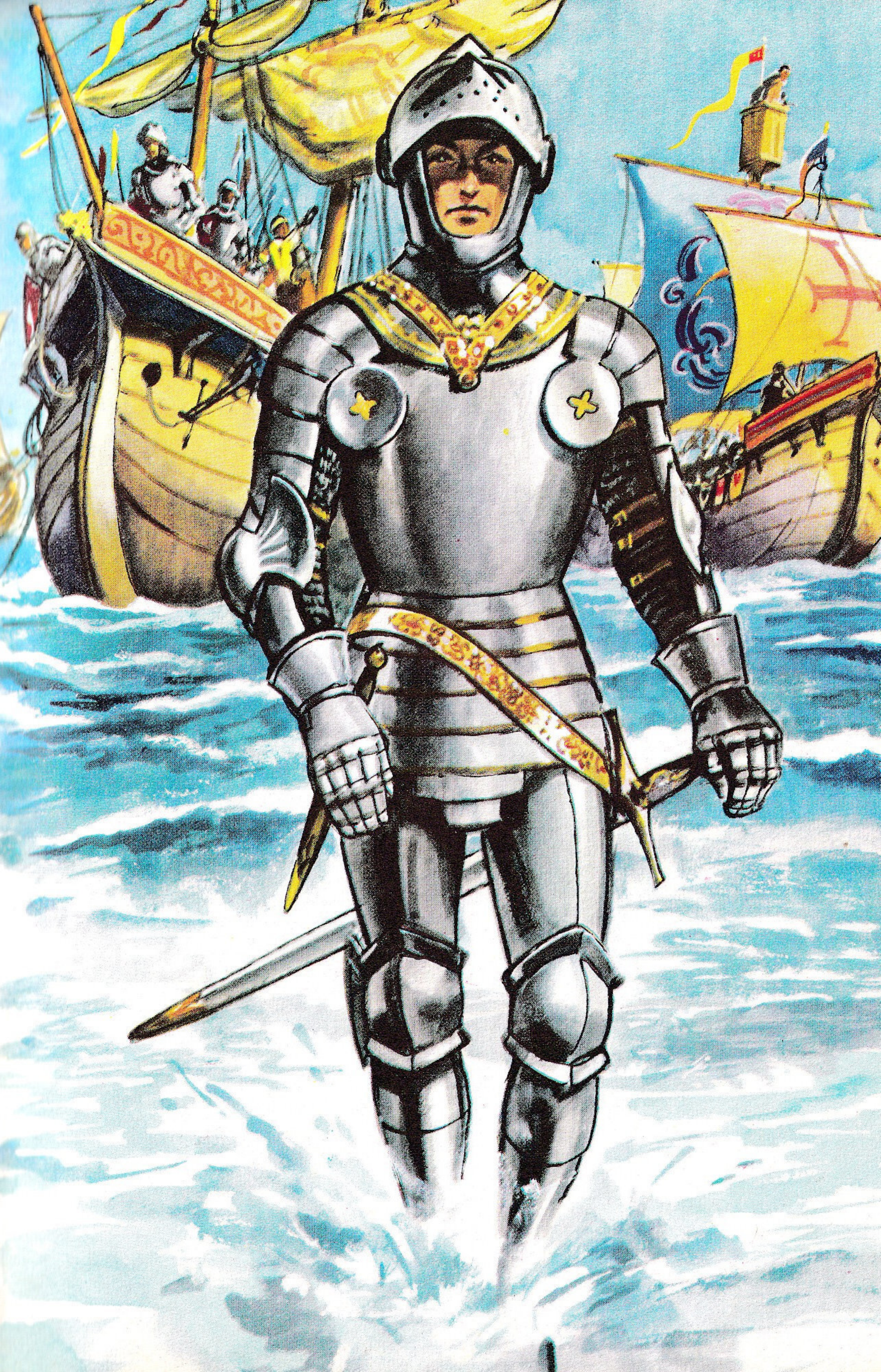


On a glorious August morning Henry V of England landed on the shore of Normandy, which his ancestors had ruled and which he claimed as his own. There was no resistance. The French forces were gathered in the fortress of Harfleur, nearby.

The ships had been run on the beach in shallow water, but instead of leaping ashore, the soldiers remained on board, watching and waiting. Henry had given strict orders that no-one was to land until he himself was on shore. In full armour he strode through the shallow waves and fell on his knees, praying for victory over his enemies. As he did so, the King's Choristers aboard the *Trinité Royale* sang a psalm.

The King rose from his knees and the soldiers swarmed ashore. It was a busy scene as thousands of men and horses were landed. Everywhere the men were struggling with the heavy weapons and the many stores needed for an army of 30,000 men.

By nightfall all had landed, and Henry could discuss the next move with his knights.



The French had not enough men in Harfleur to hinder the English landing, but Henry could not take the risk of advancing inland, leaving a fortress full of French soldiers behind him. He decided that he must first capture the town.

During the siege Henry was everywhere, encouraging the soldiers, and himself leading the attacks on the holes in the city walls made by the battering rams or by the clumsy cannons of those days.

Seeing their King so bravely daring the same dangers as themselves, the soldiers were ready to follow him anywhere. Attack after attack was made as the walls were breached or undermined. Again and again the English were thrown back, but at last, after a siege lasting a month, Harfleur surrendered. Through the silent lines of the English soldiers the leading citizens came to the place where Henry was waiting to receive the keys of the town.

Very often in those days when a town was captured, all the defenders and sometimes even the citizens were killed. Henry was more merciful. All who wished were allowed to go in peace.



The English had lost very few men in the taking of Harfleur, but more than two thousand had died from fevers brought on by living in the low-lying swamps of the estuary of the river Seine. Many more were sick and had to be sent back to England. Fewer than six thousand remained.

Henry realised that with such a small force it was impossible to conquer France, but he decided to march through the enemy's country to Calais, which was held by the English.

The army was obliged to follow the south bank of the river Somme for more than sixty miles before they were able to cross. Then, near a village called Agincourt, they saw a great French army barring their way to Calais. Henry knew that he must either fight or surrender.

The English had been marching for eighteen days, mostly in the rain. The food which they had brought with them from Harfleur had all been eaten ten days before. On the evening of October 12th, 1415, the English were weary, wet through, and very hungry.



The 25th of October was Saint Crispin's day, and as the misty sun rose, the two armies faced one another. The English were on a slight rise, with a wood on either side of them. The road to Calais ran straight down the hill towards the French.

In addition to their bows and arrows, the English bowmen were armed with swords or battle axes, and each man carried a thick piece of wood about six feet long, sharpened to a point at each end.

The bowmen now drove these stakes into the ground in rows, one behind the other, with the points directed outwards towards the French. There were now two or three lines of sharp pointed stakes between the two woods. Behind the line the bowmen, their bows strung and ready, waited for the French to attack.

They knew that the French horsemen would find it difficult to break through the lines of stakes, even if they reached them, and they were confident that at such short range, any armour would be useless against the English arrows.



The French attacked as Henry had expected. The knights in their heavy armour, some on horseback and some on foot, advanced up the hill towards the English lines.

As they came forward they found themselves in difficulties. The fields between the two armies had been ploughed, and because of the heavy rain, the ground was waterlogged. Weighed down by their armour, they sank deeper and deeper into the soft earth until some were unable to move at all.

This was what the English had been waiting for. From behind their protecting line of stakes the bowmen loosed flight after flight of arrows with deadly aim into the struggling mass of men and horses. At this moment more bowmen appeared from the woods on both sides, and after loosing their arrows, attacked the helpless French knights with swords and battleaxes.

Henry was in the midst of the battle and his brother, the Duke of York, was killed at his side. Henry himself was struck to the ground, but his knights closed round to help him, and he was soon on his feet again.



The French army had been drawn up in three sections, one behind the other.

Seeing the first wave broken and destroyed, the second section advanced to the attack. But the dead and dying men and horses made an impassable barrier. The bowmen, who had been busy recovering their arrows, were back behind their line of stakes, and a fresh storm of arrows met the French horsemen as they tried to press forward.

When their arrows were all shot away for the second time, the bowmen again sprang eagerly forward with their swords and axes. The French second line, hopelessly mixed up with the shattered remnants of the first attack, fell back before the fierce charge of the bowmen, and when the English knights followed up, they turned and fled.

The third French section never fought at all. Seeing the men of the second line retreating towards them, they galloped from the field. The battle of Agincourt was won. The French army lost eleven thousand men and many more were prisoners. The English losses were less than two hundred.



Henry returned to England in triumph. At Dover the citizens rushed into the sea to welcome him, and all the way to London he and his gallant soldiers marched through crowds of people who came from all over the southern counties to cheer their victorious King.

The city of London emptied as all the great nobles and the inhabitants, from the Lord Mayor to the humblest apprentice, swarmed out through the gates. Services of thanksgiving were held in Westminster Abbey, and feasts in the Great Hall.

Never before had England known such general rejoicings: never before had so small a force gained such an overwhelming victory against so many.

Nor was it only in the southern counties that the people celebrated the King's return. As the news spread northward, carried by galloping horsemen, fires were kindled on the hilltops from one end of England to the other, such fires as were not again to be lit until the sighting of the Spanish Armada, a hundred-and-seventy-three years later.



The battle of Agincourt had taught the French to fear the bowmen of England, but it had not conquered France. This Henry was determined to do, so after a year in England he began to gather another and larger army.

Everything was in his favour. The French nobles were fighting amongst themselves and were unlikely to join together to resist him. Henry advanced through Normandy and besieged Rouen. After a siege of many months the town surrendered, and Henry marched on Paris.

For a time the French stopped quarrelling among themselves and joined to fight the English, but soon they began to quarrel again and the Duke of Burgundy joined forces with Henry. With the approval of the Queen of France, he agreed that Henry should marry the French Princess Katherine and become King of France when the French King died.

So Henry V of England was married at Troyes, and again returned in triumph to England, accompanied by a beautiful young Queen. He was now the future King of France and it looked as though the two countries were going to be united for ever.

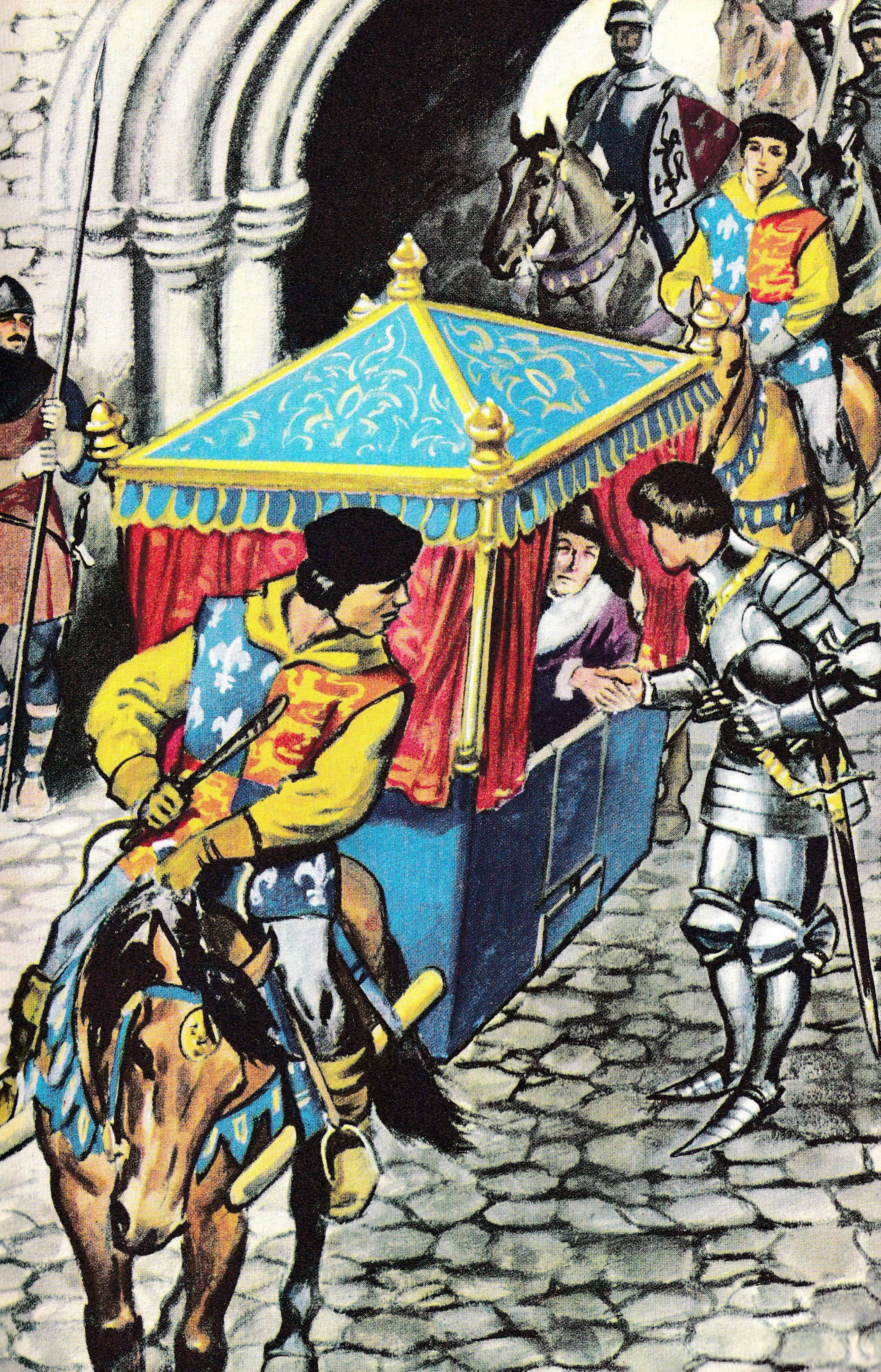


Queen Katherine was crowned at Westminster, and Henry hoped that he would now be able to remain in England and settle down to the peaceful government of the country.

This was not to be. He had left his brother, the Duke of Clarence, to command the army in France, but Clarence was not so good a general as Henry. An army, largely composed of Scots fighting in France against the hated English, had beaten him in a fierce battle. Henry decided that he must again take command of his army and repeat the victory of Agincourt.

The Duke of Burgundy was still his friend, and together they fought successfully against the Dauphin. As usual Henry was everywhere, sharing the dangers and hardships of his soldiers. In the end even his tireless strength gave out. At the siege of a fortress called Meaux he was taken ill and had to be carried on a horse litter to Vincennes.

As he lay dying, Henry's last regret was that he had not been able to lead a crusade for the recovery of Jerusalem.



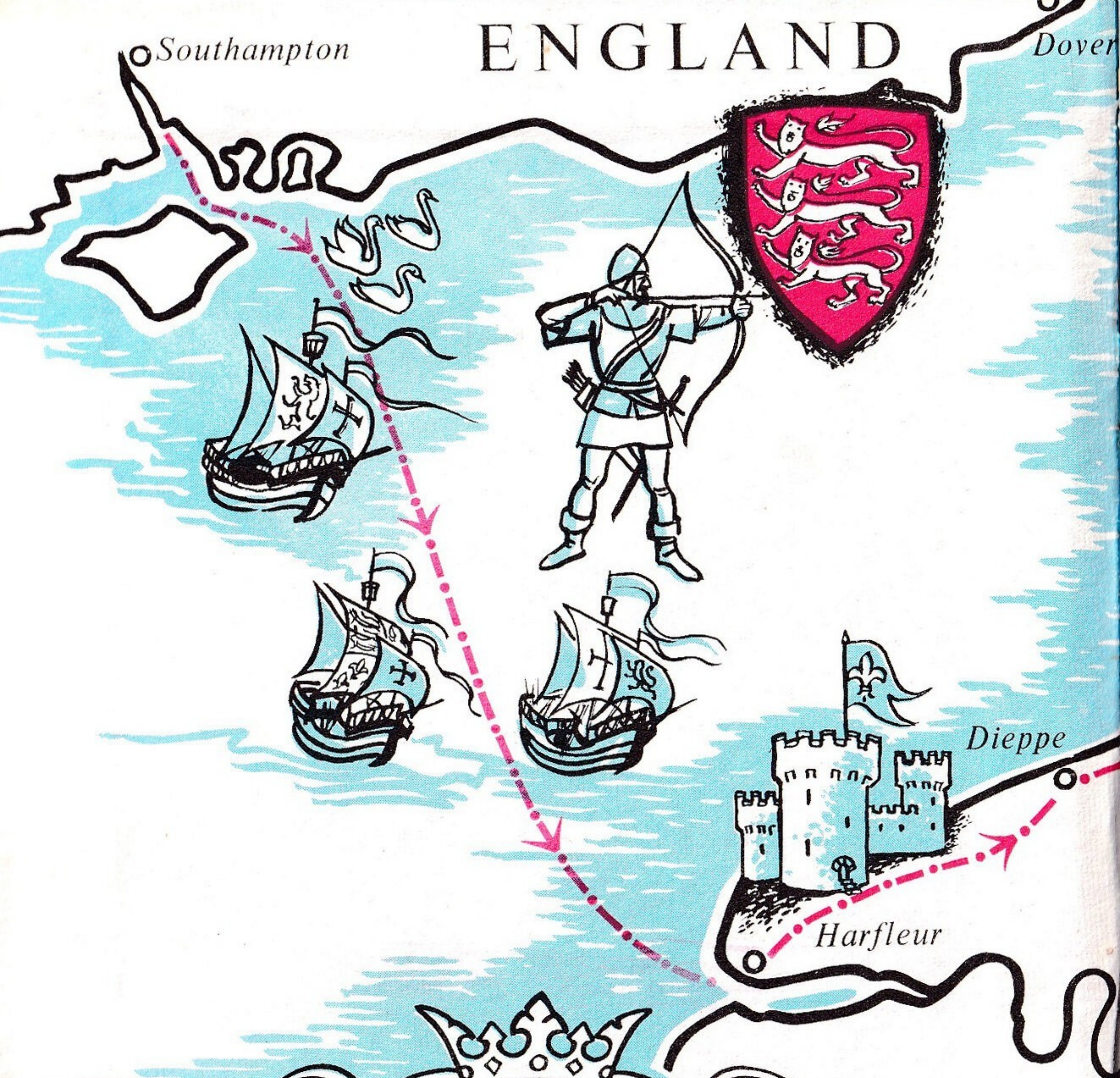
Henry was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1422. His shield, helmet, and saddle still hang above his tomb, a fitting tribute to a great soldier. But Henry was more than that. He was a wise and just ruler, and he was one of the first English kings to believe that England must have a strong navy to guard our shores.

Henry was only thirty-five when he died, and he had been King for less than ten years. During this short time he had created something in England which was never to die out: a pride in being English.

The England which he knew, and for which the bowmen of England fought, was poor and far from comfortable. It was also less crowded. There were only about one-twentieth as many people living in England in those days, most of whom were farmers. The country must have seemed very empty to travellers going from one little town to another.

We live to-day in a busy industrial Britain, but we remember and honour the men who in the past helped to make England great.





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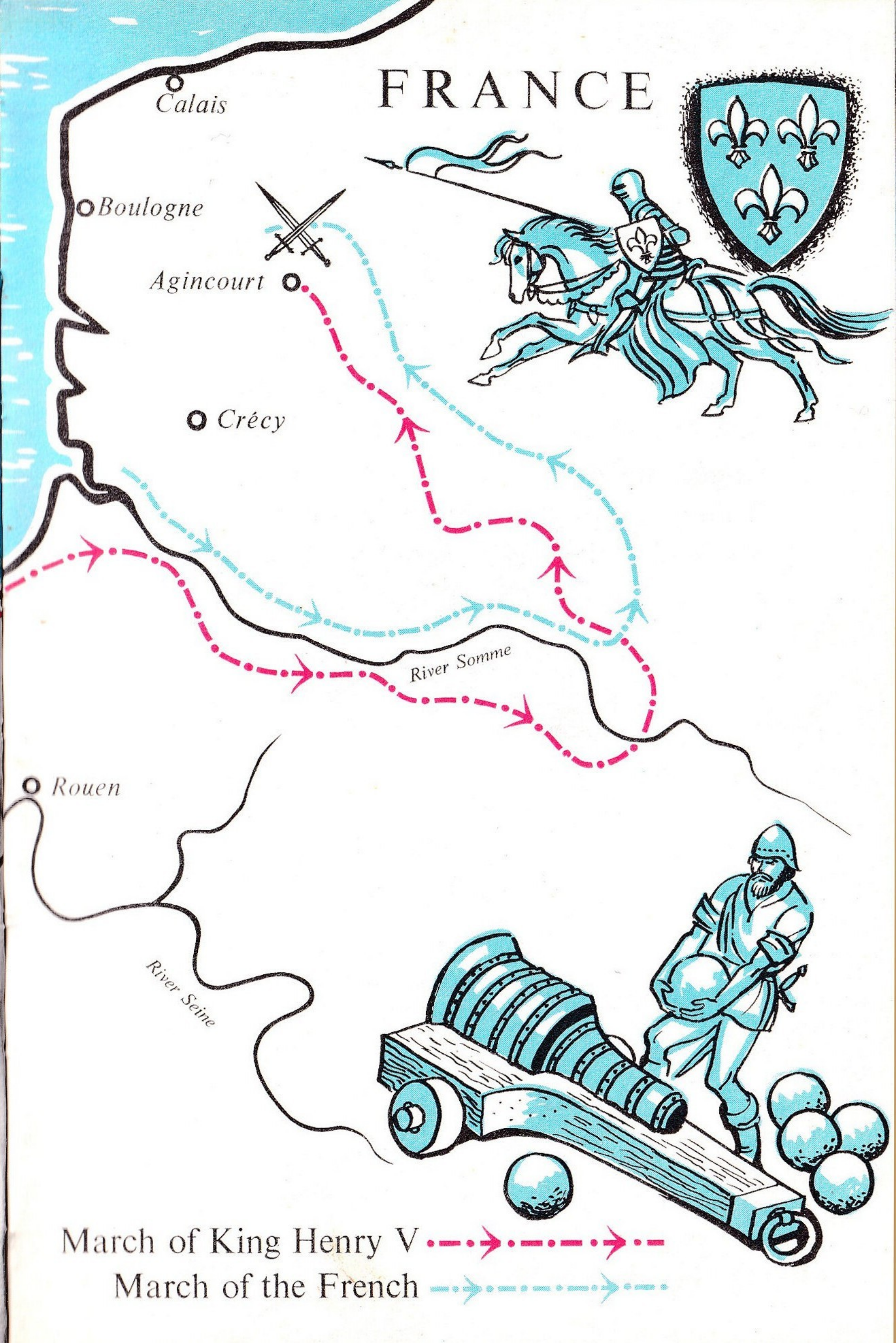
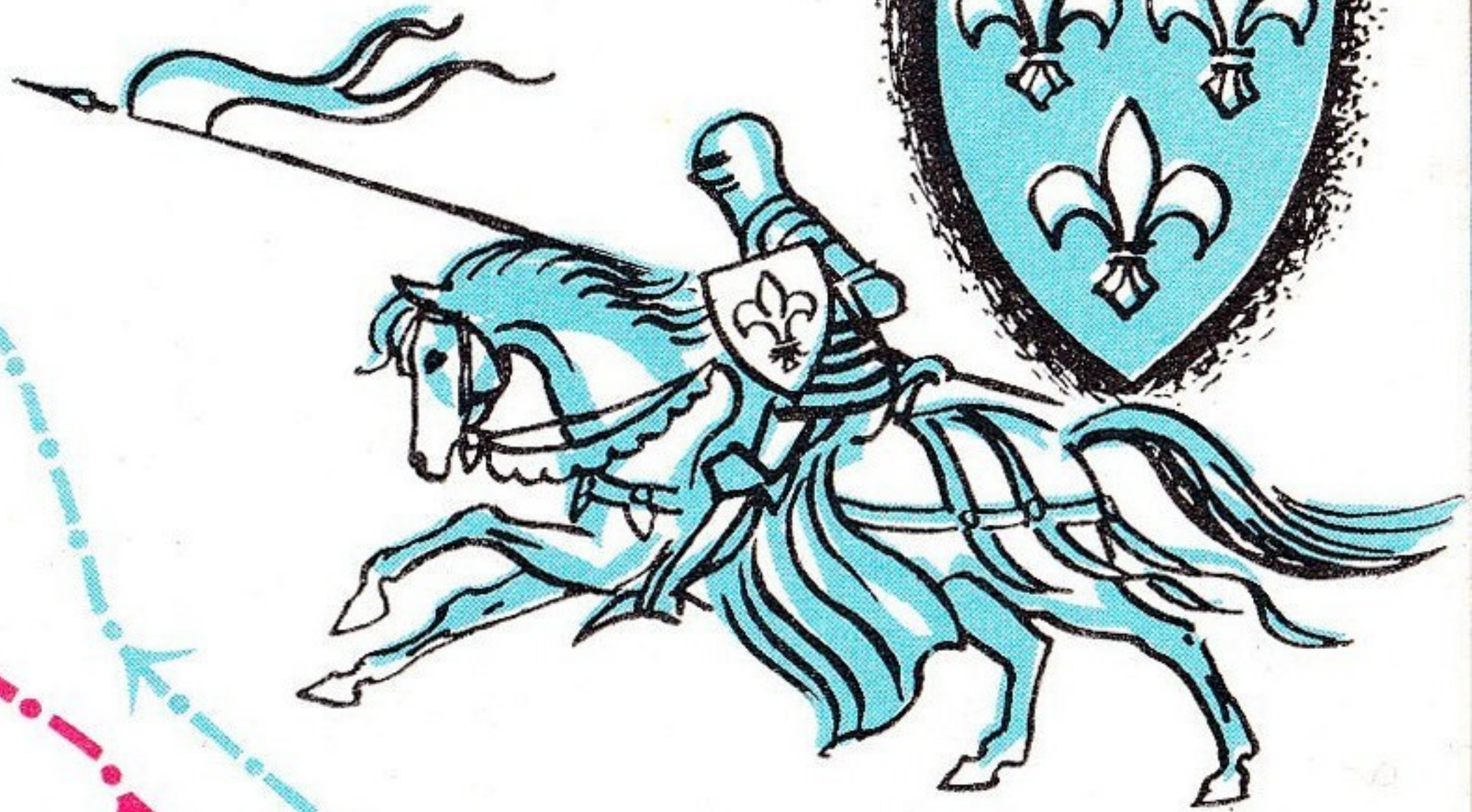
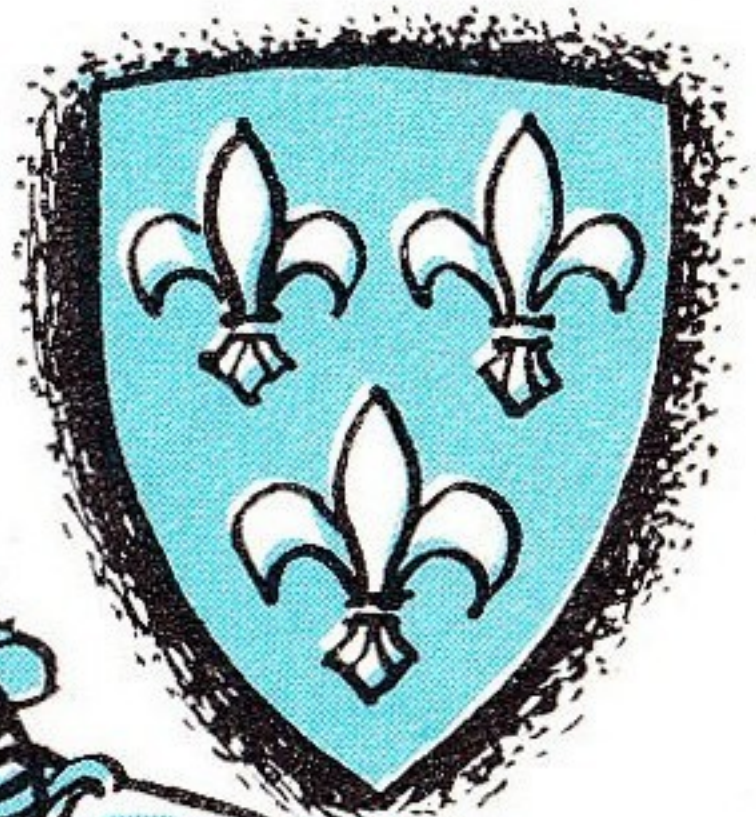
Agincourt

Crécy

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March of King Henry V

March of the French



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